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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6192
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 002049

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2016

TAGS: PREL MARR BA BILAT REGION

SUBJECT: BAHRAINI FM, A/S HILLEN, AND A/S RODMAN EXPLORE
AREAS OF COOPERATION ON REGIONAL SECURITY

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary

¶1. (C) Meeting with the U.S. delegation to the IISS Manama Dialogue conference December 8, Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid said that Iranian FM Mottaki had told him earlier in the day that Iran did not want nuclear weapons, saying they would be of no benefit to Iran. Shaikh Khalid said he was perplexed that Iran did not accept the P5 Plus 1 package of incentives. Asked about the Iraq Study Group report, A/S Hillen told the FM that the report would be one input among many the President would consider as he makes his decisions. On the Israel-Palestinian track, Shaikh Khalid said he was encouraged by indications that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert sees positive points in the Arab Peace Initiative and urged the parties to move forward on those points. Regarding Palestinian PM Haniyah's visit to Bahrain, Shaikh Khalid said he had urged Haniyah not to disregard all past achievements by former Palestinian governments. On the upcoming GCC Summit, Shaikh Khalid anticipated that there would be no significant new initiatives. He asked that the U.S. consider urging Saudi Arabia and Qatar to resolve their dispute. Shaikh Khalid expressed Bahraini concerns about the growth of sectarianism in the region. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa December 8 met with the U.S. delegation to the IISS Manama Dialogue. Representing the U.S. were Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Hillen, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

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Rodman, NSC Senior Director for Middle East and North Africa Affairs Doran, Deputy CENTCOM Commander Vice Admiral Nichols, and the Ambassador. Shaikh Khalid was accompanied by MFA Assistant Under Secretary Shaikh Abdul Aziz Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa.

Iran and the Incentive Package

¶3. (C) Shaikh Khalid opened the meeting by expressing his country's thanks for U.S. support and protection. He mentioned that he had seen Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki earlier in the day and that they had discussed Iran's nuclear program. Shaikh Khalid said he had told Mottaki that Iran had a right to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Mottaki reportedly responded, "We don't even want nuclear weapons. What would they do for us?" Shaikh Khalid told A/S Hillen that this was the third different reason the Iranians had given to demonstrate that

they had no intention of developing nuclear weapons. Shaikh Khalid said, "I'm not sure what to believe. We know all about the (P5 Plus 1) package of incentives that has been offered to them. If they truly only want nuclear technology for power, why haven't they accepted the package?" A/S Hillen noted that since Iran had not yet responded to any of the diplomatic actions, positive or negative, it was important to keep up the pressure from as many directions as possible.

ISG Report

¶4. (C) Shaikh Khalid asked what changes the region could expect as a result of the release of the Iraq Study Group report. A/S Hillen told the FM that the report would be one piece of advice that the President would use to make future decisions about Iraq, noting that the President routinely weighs several sources of advice. Shaikh Abdul Aziz noted that a central suggestion of the report was a change in focus from a military combat role to a training role. A/S Rodman said that this shift was already taking place, with a goal of increasing the numbers of Iraqi police and military personnel who have sufficient training.

Israel-Palestinian Track

¶5. (C) Shaikh Khalid said he was encouraged by indications from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that the Arab Peace Initiative had positive points. Shaikh Khalid stated that the Arab Initiative contained very basic principles and needed to be updated and fleshed out. He said that Bahrain and Israel share a mutual respect for one another and that it

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was important to engage with the Israelis to explore points on which negotiations can proceed. While the focus on the Palestinian track was most important, Shaikh Khalid noted that there should also be engagement with Syria on the Golan so it feels it is part of the process. He also mentioned that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas needs to take more fiscal control of government operations. He urged increased support to empower Abbas.

¶6. (C) Shaikh Khalid said that the Israel-Palestinian problem is an underlying issue for conflict in the region because it seems to be an intractable conflict that cannot be resolved. The conflict is a rallying point for extremists. "If we could resolve this issue and thereby remove this rallying point, we can undermine extremist rhetoric." A/S Rodman commented that Israel recognizes a common interest with the Gulf Arabs in confronting Iran. This adds an incentive for Israel to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians.

¶7. (C) Commenting on Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyah's visit to Bahrain, Shaikh Khalid said Haniyah was looking for financial aid for the Palestinian government. Shaikh Khalid said he had told Haniyah that Bahrain's support for the Palestinian people is strong, but he urged Haniyah not to lose the agreements that had been reached in the past (by former Palestinian governments). Shaikh Khalid said that he had told Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmoud al-Zahar in an earlier visit, "You cannot just disregard previous government accomplishments." However, al-Zahar was steadfast in his stance that Hamas does not and will not recognize any previous agreements with the Israelis.

Bahraini GSD Delegation to Visit U.S.

¶8. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz reminded the group that on a

previous visit by a U.S. delegation to discuss the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD), the group had identified six pillars for action. It was now necessary to identify those who would be tasked with carrying out the action items within each pillar. A/S Hillen told the Foreign Minister that Crown Prince Shaikh Salman had told him earlier that he would lead a delegation to the U.S. in the spring to discuss the range of GSD issues.

GCC Summit and GCC Plus 2

¶ 9. (C) When asked about anticipated outcomes from the December 9-10 GCC Summit, Shaikh Khalid said it was unlikely that there would be any significant new initiatives this year, but there would be serious discussions about Iraq and how to face Iran. Shaikh Khalid commented that the Saudi-Qatari dispute continued to sour relations among GCC countries. He suggested that it could be helpful if the U.S. were to urge the two countries to resolve their differences. A/S Hillen commented that the U.S. had pushed the Qataris on their commitment to the central strategy to confront Iran. Shaikh Khalid said the Bahrainis do not know where the Qataris stand exactly.

¶ 10. (C) When asked about his thoughts on the GCC plus two, Shaikh Khalid said that he saw it as a group with an important role. He suggested that in addition to Egypt and Jordan, Yemen should be included among the participants if the group intended to deal with Iran in any depth. Shaikh Khalid suggested that others be included as needed on an ad hoc basis.

Sectarianism Is Region's Largest Problem

¶ 11. (C) Shaikh Khalid expressed his concerns about the growth of sectarianism in the region, calling attention to the recent Bahraini elections and the "us versus them" mentality that could be sensed during the process. He recalled that in the 1970's, before the Iranian revolution, Bahraini society was mixed in a natural way. At that time it was common to see Sunni and Shia intermarriages, but the revolution in 1979 brought sectarianism to Bahrain. Iran is now trying to exploit sectarianism for its benefit in some other countries in the region, he said. Iraq has now magnified the sectarian split and "we all will need to help Iraq get out of the cycle of violence and sectarianism that has engulfed it."

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¶ 12. (U) A/S Hillen, A/S Rodman, and Dr. Doran cleared this cable.

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